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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: TAWAFUQ WITHDRAWAL IMPACT ON COR AND CABINET
REF: BAGHDAD 2410

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On August 1, Tawafuq followed through on its threat to withdraw its six ministers from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government. Maliki has responded to similar situations in the past by appointing "acting ministers" from his own cabinet (i.e., asking sitting ministers to cover a second ministry). For now, all Tawafuq Members of Parliament are remaining in their positions, as is Vice President Tarik al-Hashimi. Tawafuq controls 44 votes in the Council of Representatives (CoR) but would need another 94 to obtain a vote of no-confidence in Maliki. Securing the necessary votes would require forming a coalition across disparate political blocs and is unlikely to occur. END SUMMARY.

Maliki's Next Step for the Cabinet

¶2. (C) On August 1, Tawafuq announced the withdrawal of its six ministers -- including Deputy Prime Minister Zuba'i -- from Maliki's cabinet. Although Tawafuq originally proposed Minister of Defense al-Ubaydi, he has since broken with the front and was not part of the withdrawal.

¶3. (C) A review of Maliki's response to the Sadr bloc's ministerial withdrawals in December 2006 and April 2007 may provide clues to his probable reaction in dealing with this crisis. In both cases, Maliki replaced the Sadrists with "acting ministers" drawn from his own cabinet who then had responsibility for two ministerial positions. Maliki may once again reach for the same strategy, not least because for some time he has been considering a cabinet shuffle. While this may work as a stop-gap measure, it may not provide a lasting solution; Maliki has twice forwarded nominations to the CoR to replace the Sadrists, but could not muster enough support to have them approved. Consequently, the CoR declined to vote on his nominees. For the time being, Maliki has said he will not act on the resignations.

Vote of No-Confidence?

¶4. (C) Article 61 of the constitution sets out the procedure for the CoR to withdraw confidence from the Prime Minister. First, 25 MPs must submit an inquiry to the PM. Second, one-fifth of the CoR (55 MPs) must submit a request for a withdrawal of confidence at least seven days after submission of the inquiry. Finally, this request must be approved by an absolute majority - 138 - of the parliament.

¶5. (C) With 44 members, Tawafuq acting independently could only submit an inquiry to the PM, the first step in the process. However, widespread dissatisfaction with the Maliki government has fueled constant rumors of the emergence of an anti-Maliki front. One possibility (reftel: 2410) is an alliance between Tawafuq, Fadhila, Iraqiyya, the Sadr Bloc, and the Iraqi National Dialogue Front. This front could, in

theory, have up to 127 votes and, if it attracted enough independents, might pull off a vote of no-confidence. Another possibility would be a deal between Tawafuq and the Kurdish alliance (55 seats) - bringing the total to 99 votes - with the remaining 39 votes coming from various Shi'a groups.

¶6. (C) Comment: The good news is that, barring an extraordinary session, the CoR is in recess until September 4th, so Maliki is not in immediate danger. Moreover, the above breakdown assumes perfect attendance from the various blocs. In fact, attendance is a major problem at the CoR, where only 50-60% of MPs are present even on days when there is a quorum. Even as part of an effort to oust the PM, the blocs might find it difficult to muster all of their theoretical votes. Finally, we assess that CoR members are unlikely to press a vote of no confidence unless there is a consensus over a replacement candidate. While the names of Adel Abdul Mehdi, Ibrahim Ja'afari, and (occasionally) Ayad Allawi constantly surface, there is no indication of any broad agreement. End Comment.

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